

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON.

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IT MAY OCCUR to mythographers that I treat as historical narratives and names that cannot be taken so seriously; but in a study of primitive culture fables become facts and evidences. A grand harvest awaits that master of mythology and folklore who shall bravely explore the legends of David and Solomon, but in the present essay mythical details can only be dealt with incidentally. Some of these may be considered at the outset.

It is said in 1 Kings i.: "Now King David was old and "stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat "no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be "sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand "before the king, and cherish him; and let her lie in thy bosom, "that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair "damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag "the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel "was very fair; and she cherished the king and ministered to him; but the king knew her not."

That this story is characteristic of lustful David cannot blind us to the fact of its improbability. Whatever may be meant by "the coasts of Israel," the impression is conveyed of a long journey, and it is hardly credible that so much time should be taken for a moribund monarch. Many interpretations are possible of the name Abishag, but it is usually translated "Father (or source) of error." However this may be, the story bears a close resemblance to the search for a wife for Isaac. When Abraham sent out this commission he also "was old and well stricken in age," and of Rebekah it is said, "The damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her." (Gen. xxiv.) Rebekah means "ensnarer," and Abishag "father (source) of error"; and both women cause trouble between two brothers.

There is an Oriental accent about both of these stories. In ancient Indian literature there are several instances of servants sent out to search the world for a damsel fair and wise enough to wed the son and heir of some grand personage. Maya, the mother of Buddha, was sought for in the same way. This of itself is not enough to prove that the Biblical narratives in question are of Oriental origin, but there is a Tibetan tale which contains several details which seem to bear on this point. The tale is that of Viśākhā, and it is accessible to English readers in a translation by Schiefner and Ralston of the "Kah-Gyur." (Trübner's Oriental Series.)

Viśākha was the seventh son of Mrgadhara, prime minister of the king of Kośala. For this youth a bride was sought by a Brahman, who in the land of Champa found a beautiful maiden whose name was also Viśākhā. She was with other girls entering a park, where they all bathed in a tank,—her companions taking off their clothes, but Viśākhā lifting her dress by degrees as she entered the water. Besides showing decorum, this maiden conducted herself differently from the others in everything, some of her actions being mysterious. The Brahman, having contrived to meet her alone, questioned her concerning these peculiarities, for all of which she gave reasons implying exceptional wisdom and virtue. On his return the Brahman described this maiden to the prime minister, who set forth and asked her hand for his son, and she was brought to Kośala on a ship with great pomp. The maiden then for a long time gives evidence of extraordinary wisdom, one example being of special importance to our inquiry: she determines which of two women claiming a child is the real mother. The king and his ministers being unable to settle the dispute, Viśākhā said: "Speak to the two women thus: 'As we do not know to which of you two the boy belongs, let her who is the strongest take the boy.' When each of them has taken hold of one of the boy's hands, and he begins to cry out on account of the pain, the real mother will let go, being full of compassion for him, and knowing that if her child remains alive she will be able to see it again; but the other, who has no compassion for him, will not let go. Then beat her with a switch, and she will thereupon confess the truth of the whole matter."

In comparing this with the famous judgment of Solomon there appear some reasons for believing the Oriental tale to be the earlier. In the Biblical tale there is evidently a missing link. Why should the false mother, who had so desired the child, consent to have it cut in two? What motive could she have? But in the

Tibetan tale one of the women is the wife, the other the concubine, of a householder. The wife bore him no child and was jealous of the concubine on account of her babe. The concubine, feeling certain that the wife would kill the child, gave it to her, with her lord's approval; but after his death possession of the house had to follow motherhood of the child. If, however, the child were dead the false claimant would be mistress of the house. Here, then, is a motive wanting in the story of Solomon, and suggesting that the latter is not the original.

In the ancient "Mahosadha Jataka" the false claimant proves to be a Yakshini (a sort of siren and vampire) who wishes to eat the child. To Buddha himself is here ascribed the judgment, which is much the same as that of the "wise Champa maiden," Viśākhā. Here also is a motive for assenting to the child's death or injury which is lacking in the Biblical story.

Here, then, we find in ancient Indian literature a tale which may be fairly regarded as the origin of the "Judgment of Solomon." And it belongs to a large number of Oriental tales in which the situations and accents of the Biblical narratives concerning David and Solomon often occur. There is a cave-born youth, Aśuga, son of a Brahman and a bird-fairy, with a magic lute which accompanies his verses, and who dallies with Brahmadetta's wife. A king, enamored of a beautiful foreign woman beneath him in rank, obtains her by a promise that her son, if one is born, shall succeed him on the throne, to the exclusion of his existing heir by his wife of equal birth; but he permits arrangements for his elder son's succession to go on until induced by a threat of war from the new wife's father and country to fulfil his promise. A prime minister, Mahaushadha, travels in disguise of a Brahman in order to find a true wife: he meets with a witty maiden (Viśākhā) who directs him to her village by a road where he will see her naked at a bathing tank, though she had taken another road. This minister was, like David, lowly born; a "deity" revealed him to the king, as Jahveh revealed David to Samuel; he was a seventh minister, as David was a seventh son, and Solomon also.

Although the number seven was sacred among the ancient Hebrews, it does not appear to have been connected by them with exceptional wisdom or occult powers in man or woman. The ideas in which such legends as "The Seven Wise Masters," "The Seven Sages," and the superstition about a seventh son's second-sight, originate and are traceable to ancient Indo-Iranian theosophy. It may be useful here to read the subjoined extract from

Darmesteter's introduction to the "Vendîdâd." Having explained that the religion of the Persian Magi is derived from the same source as that of the Indian Rishis, that is from the common forefathers of both Iranian and Indian, he says :

"The Indo-Iranian Asura (the supreme but not the only god) was often conceived as sevenfold : by the play of certain mythical formulæ and the strength of certain mythical numbers, the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians had been led to speak of seven worlds, and the supreme god was often made sevenfold, as well as the worlds over which he ruled. The names and the attributes of the seven gods had not been as yet defined, nor could they be then ; after the separation of the two religions, these gods, named Aditya, 'the infinite ones,' in India, were by and by identified there with the sun, and their number was afterwards raised to twelve, to correspond to the twelve aspects of the sun. In Persia, the seven gods are known as Amesha Spentas, 'the undying and well-doing ones' ; they by and by, according to the new spirit that breathed in the religion, received the names of the deified abstractions, Vohu-manô (good thought), Asha Vahista (excellent holiness), Khshathra Vairya (perfect sovereignty), Spenta Armaiti (divine piety), Haurvatât and Ameretât (health and immortality). The first of them all was and remained Ahura Mazda ; but whereas formerly he had been only the first of them, he was now their father. 'I invoke the glory of the Amesha Spentas, who all seven have one and the same thinking, one and the same speaking, one and the same father and lord, Ahura Mazda.' (Yast xix. 16.)"¹

In Persian religion the Seven are always wise and beneficent. The vast folklore derived from this Parsî religion included the Babylonian belief in seven powerful spirits, associated with the Pleiades, beneficent at certain seasons, but normally malevolent : they all move together, taking possession of human beings, as in the case of the seven devils cast out of Mary Magdalene. In Egypt the seven are always evil. But neither of these sevens are especially clever. In Buddhist legends they are not so carefully classified, the seventh son or daughter manifesting exceptional powers, sometimes of good, sometimes of evil, but they are usually referred to for this wit or wisdom. In the Davidian and Solomonic legends these notions are found as if merely adhering to some importation, and without any perception of the significance of the number seven. David is an eighth son in 1 Sam. xvi. 10-13, but a seventh son in 1 Chron. ii. 16. Solomon is a tenth son in 1 Chron. iii. 1-6, but the seventh *legitimate* son in 2 Sam. xii. 24-25. The word *Sheba* means "the seven," but the early scribes appear to have understood it as *shaba*, "he swears," as in Gen. xxi. 30-31, where after the seven ewe lambs have given the well its name *Beersheba*, it is

¹ *Sacred Books of the East*. Edited by F. Max Müller. Vol. IV. The Zend-Avesta. Part I. The Vendîdâd. Translated by James Darmesteter. P. lix., et seq.

ascribed the significance of an oath. *Bathsheba* is commonly translated "Daughter of the Oath," but there can be little doubt that the name means "Daughter of the Seven," and that it originated in the astute tricks by which that Hittite woman made herself Queen Mother and her son king, above the lawful heir, whom she was instrumental (perhaps purposely) in getting out of the way by furthering his wishes.

Moral obliquities are little considered in these fair favorites of translunary powers. *Viśākhā*, in one Buddhist tale, gets herself chosen by the Brahman as bride of a great man by her care to veil her charms at the bath; in another tale she attracts a prime minister in disguise, and becomes his wife, partly by laying aside all of her clothing at a bathing tank where she knows he will see her. *Bathsheba's* fame is similarly various. Her nudity and ready adultery with the king did not prevent her from passing into Talmudic tradition as "blessed among women," and to her was even ascribed the beautiful chapter of Proverbs (xxxi.) in praise of the virtuous wife! In the "Wisdom of Solomon" she is described as the "handmaiden" of the Lord in anticipation of the Christian ideal of immaculate womanhood.

A similar development might no doubt be traced in the beautiful story of *Viśākhā* of *Shravastī*, the most famous of the female lay-disciples of Buddha. The queries put to her by Buddha and her explanations of her petitions, which had appeared enigmatic, are related in Carus's *Gospel of Buddha*, and in form correspond with the very different questions and solutions that passed between the Brahman and the Tibetan *Viśākhā*, already mentioned. The name *Viśākhā*, from a Sanskrit root, meaning to divide, came to mean selection and intelligence, of all kinds, but in the matron of *Shravastī* wit becomes the genius of charity, and cleverness expands to enlightenment.

The Queen of Sheba,—"*Queen of the Seven*,"—is a sister spirit of this lay-disciple. Whatever truth may underlie the legends of this lady, there is little doubt of her legendary relation to the Wise Women of Buddhist parables,—to *Viśākhā* of the sevenfold wisdom; and of her who decided between the rival claimants to the same child; to *Ambapālī*, the courtesan, who journeyed to hear Buddha's wisdom and presented to him and his disciples her park and mansion; and to the Queen of Glory, whose story belongs "to a very early period in the history of Buddhism." Such is the opinion of Mr. Rhys Davids, whose translation of the *Mahāsudassana-Sutta*, containing an account of the queen's visit to the King of

Glory, in his Palace of Justice, attended by her fourfold army, and may be read in Vol. XI., p. 276, of *Sacred Books of the East*.

This exaltation of human knowledge and wisdom, travelling to find it, testing it with riddles and questions, belongs to the cult of the Magus and the Pundit.

With reference to the seventh son Viśākha (all-potential) and his all-wise bride Viśākhā, a notable parallelism is found in the substantial identity of "Solomon" and "the Shunnamite," on account of whom he slew his brother Adonijah. Shunnamite is equivalent to Shulamite, substantially the same as Solomon (peaceful), but here probably meaning that she was a "Solomoness," a very wise woman. That such was her reputation appears by the "Song of Songs."

An equally striking comparison may be made between the naming of Solomon and the naming of Mahaushadha, the Tibetan "Solomon" already mentioned as having married a wise Viśākhā. Among the many proofs of wisdom given by this village-born youth was the discovery of the real husband of a woman claimed by two men. One of the men being much the weaker, there could be no such trial as that proposed in the child's case by Viśākhā. Mahaushadha questioned the two men as to what they had last eaten, then made them vomit and so found out which had told the truth. Let us compare this Tibetan minister's birth with that of Solomon :

"When the boy came into the world and his birth-feast was celebrated, the name of Mahaushadha (Great Remedy) was given to him at the request of his mother, inasmuch as she, who had long suffered from illness, and had been unable to obtain relief from the time of the boy's conception, had been cured by him." (*Tib. Tales*, p. 133.)

"And Jahveh struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and . . . on the seventh day [it was the seventh son] the child died. . . . And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her ; and she bare a son, and she called his name Solomon. And Jahveh loved him ; and he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah [Beloved of Jah] for Jahveh's sake." (2 Sam. xii.)

In the Revised Version "she called" is given in the margin as "another reading," but that it is the right reading appears by the context: it was she that was "comforted," and in her babe she found "rest"—which "Solomon" strictly means. Among the Hebrews the naming of a child was an act of authority, and it is difficult to believe that in any purely Hebrew narrative a woman would be described as setting aside the name given by Jahveh himself. But the high position of woman in the Iranian and the Buddhist religions is well known.

In comparative studies the questions to be determined concerning parallel incidents are—whether they are trivial coincidences; whether they are not based in such universal beliefs or simple facts that they may have been of independent origin; whether the historic conditions of time and place admit of any supposed borrowing; if borrowing occurred which is the original? With regard to the above parallelisms I submit that one of them, at least,—the Judgment of Solomon,—is neither trivial nor based in simple facts, and could not have originated independently of the Indian tale; that the others, though each, if it stood alone, might be a mere coincidence, are too numerous to be so explained; that the time and conditions which rendered it possible that the names of the apes and peacocks (1 Kings x. 22) imported by Solomon should be Indian proves the possibility of importations of tales from the same country. (See Rhys Davids's *Buddhist Birth Stories*, p. xlvii.)

The question remaining to be determined—which region was the borrower—cannot be settled, in the present cases, by the relative antiquity of the books in which they are found: not only are the ages of all the books, Hebrew and Oriental, doubtful, but they are all largely made up of narratives long anterior to their compilation. The safest method, therefore, must be study of the intrinsic character of each narrative with a view to discovering the country to whose intellectual and social fauna and flora, so to say, it is most related, and which of the stories bears least of the faults incidental to translation. I have applied this touchstone to the above examples, and believe that the Oriental stories are the originals. The Judgment of Solomon appears to me to have lost an essential link, a *motif*, which it retains in Buddhist versions. And I do not believe that any Hebrew Bathsheba could have set aside a name given her child by a prophet, in the name of Jahveh, in order to celebrate by another name the “rest” she found from her sorrows.

On the other hand, the borrowings by other countries from the legend of Solomon appear much more numerous. In some cases, as the legend of Jemshîd, there appear to have been exchanges between the two great sages, but the Solomonic traditions seem preponderant in Vikramadatsya, the demon-commanding hero of India. Solomon became a proverb of wisdom and liberality in Abyssinia, Arabia, and Persia. Ideal Sulaimans and Solimas abound. Solomon has influenced the legends of many heroes, such as Haroun-Alraschid and Charlemagne, and I will even venture

a suspicion that the fame, and perhaps the name, of Solon have been influenced by the legend of Solomon. Lexicographers give no account of Solon's name; he is assigned to a conjectural period before written Greek existed; his interviews with Cræsus, given in Herodotus, are hopelessly unhistorical, and his moralisings to the rich man recall the book of Proverbs. The Solon of Plato's *Critias* is already a mythological voyager, a Sindebad-Solomon, and his romance of the lost Atlantis is like an idealised rumor of the Wise Man's Kingdom. Solon's "history" was developed by Plutarch, seven centuries after the era assigned to the sage, out of poetical fragments ascribed to him, and he is represented as a great trader and traveller in the regions associated with Solomon. It is doubtful whether this chief of the Seven Sages, whose Solomonic motto was "Know Thyself" (cf. Prov. xiv. 8), could he reappear would know himself as historically costumed by writers in our era, from Plutarch to Grote.

At any rate there is little doubt of a reference to the Seven Spentas or to the Seven Sages in Proverbs ix. 1:

"Wisdom hath builded her house,
She hath hewn out her seven pillars."